

Prayer Meeting

"THE VALUE OF RIGHTEOUS LEADERS."

Isaiah 55: 4-5.

Week Beginning February 14.

The passage selected for our study has no reference to merely human leaders, but is a prophecy of Christ as the spiritual guide of his people. He is first called a witness, then a leader and commander, then a herald or ambassador, who wins strange nations to his following. History has been a gradual fulfillment of the prophecy, "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not and a nation that knew not thee shall run unto thee."

If we could see time and its events from the supreme viewpoint of our Sovereign Lord, what a marvelous vision we would have of him as "leader and commander!" He is working out a great, comprehensive plan of grace and glory. It is a unit, though infinitely diversified in its administration and operation. Much of its method is concealed. Its departments and stages seem often to conflict. Instead of the appearance of progress there is often that of retrogression. So obscure and strange is the unfolding of the divine plan that most loyal subjects are at times tempted to complain and doubt. The way seems so steep and winding that faithful followers, if guided only by carnal vision, would grow faint-hearted and faithless. But he said of himself as the Good Shepherd, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Not only to the chosen nation was he to be a leader, but he was to be a Light of the Gentiles as well as of his people Israel.

The figure before us is that of one who governs or conducts the movement of great numbers, like the ruler of a nation or the commander of an army. The Scriptures represent Christ as Lord of hosts, Lawgiver, Judge, Protector, Ruler. He is all these and more to his people.

He leads by his providence; often difficult of interpretation; indeed, usually mysterious; but instrumentality which he has ordained and over which he is supreme. In our relation to the progress of human events, especially those realities which emerge day by day, closely affecting our personal lives, we must believe that he is "God over all, blessed forevermore."

He leads by the precepts and imperishable principles of his holy word. If our minds are stored with these we have "a more sure word of prophecy whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts."

He leads us by the personal presence and efficiency of his Holy Spirit, "working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight." He is our advocate—one who comes to our side to help us. He undertakes for us the great cause which involves our entire well-being. "He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you."

He leads us by revealing himself. A knowledge of his personality in all his offices and his entire redemptive work is a sure source of guidance. As we approximate this personal knowledge, so shall his leadership be intimate and constant and our following will be faithful and unerring. "They know his voice."

If we are to consider human leadership, we may comprehend all in saying that men who are most like Christ are best qualified to lead and command his people. Infirmities of intellect or heart, of morals or volition, disqualify for leadership. Christ had none of these. Christlikeness implies power.

"O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me: let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy tabernacles." (Ps. 43:3).

Young People's Society

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND.

Topic for Sunday, February 21—Pilgrim's Progress Series.
II. The Slough of Despond. Psalm 69: 1-4; 13-18; 40: 1-3.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: Elijah in despair. 1 Kings 19: 1-8.

Tuesday: Three bitter days. Acts 9: 1-11.

Wednesday: The soul cast down. Psalm 42: 1-6.

Thursday: The way out of despair. Psalm 91.

Friday: Faith's triumph. Romans 5: 1-5.

Saturday: The peace that never fails. Philippians 4: 4-7.

Despondency is a matter of the heart rather than of the head. All reason is against it.

No one has a right to despond who has God by his side. God's presence makes a solid way through.

The slough lies across almost every one's path, but that is far from meaning that it ends every one's path.

To many despondency is constitutional or temperamental. They are by nature low spirited, "all their life time subject to bondage."

People of this class are met with almost every day. They are the ones of whom we sometimes say that they seem really and literally to "enjoy poor health."

The best cure for temperamental despondency is more companionship with cheerful people, and especially with the cheerfulness and helpfulness of Christ's companionship.

In many the cause for despondency is a low state of health. A good physical treatment, medicine and diet, are needed here. God expects his people to take good care of themselves.

To some despondency is the shadow cast back over the pathway of previous sins. The shadow often lasts even when the cloud has been withdrawn from directly over our heads.

Jacob, least of all of whom we read, should have been filled with gloom, after all that God did for him, especially in the darkness of Bethel's sleep and the all-night struggle with the Angel at Jabbok.

Yet Jacob exclaimed, when his nine sons came back from Egypt, "All these things are against me." He should have remembered God's goodness of the years already passed and should have trusted more. He had full warrant for trust.

The cause for despondency, as in Jacob's case, so far from justifying that condition, should produce cheerfulness of mind and heart. "All these things" were not against Jacob. They were simply links in the chain of God's goodness.

But Jacob was doubtless resting just then under the cloud of his own past misdeeds. They shadowed his heart. He had done evil. Though forgiven, his sins had left their mark. The scars are the last thing to be obliterated where sin has made its wound.

Blessed be God, there is a remedy. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Here is provision for the most sorely distressed and troubled. Let him "stay upon his God."

The finest picture of peace is drawn to show the waters of a placid lake, the mild moonbeams falling upon its bosom with a silvery sheen, while the banks and woods around seem to have gone to a gentle sleep; but the bird resting securely and quietly in its nest while the hurtling clouds and storm are raging furiously overhead and around, while the trees of the forest bend beneath the hurricane, while all nature is torn and rent.